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ABSTRACT

Collaborative strategies were used by The College of Saint Rose (CSR) and 15 rural school districts in upstate New York to implement preservice teacher training and programming to better meet the needs of handicapped learners in rural settings. Through meetings and questionnaires, rural administrative teams identified relevant skills and issues that preservice teachers need to work effectively with handicapped students in mainstreamed settings in rural areas. This input, along with conclusions drawn from literature reviews, provided the basis for preparation of a Rural Education Resource Booklet to assist CSR faculty in adopting a curriculum infusion approach to include rural components in their education courses, with emphasis on problems of teaching mainstreamed handicapped students in rural settings. The booklet contained an introduction and rationale for teacher preparation for rural service, gave five key competencies for teaching handicapped children in rural areas, and identified several major objectives for teaching each competency. The booklet also suggested content for teaching these objectives through educational profiles, readings, activities, dilemmas, simulations, discussion questions, transparencies, resource lists, and information on new technology. By fall 1985, two student teachers had been placed in participating rural school districts and nine CSR faculty members had incorporated rural materials into their courses. (NEC)

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A Curriculum Infusion Approach to Preservice Rural Teacher Preparation: Strategies and Resources

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A Curriculum Infusion Approach to

Preservice Rural Teacher Preparation: Strategies and Resources

ABSTRACT

There is a need to improve preservice training for teachers who will be employed in rural settings. This paper discusses the collaborative strategies used by The College of Saint Rose (CSR) and fifteen rural school districts in upstate New York to implement preservice teacher training and programming to better meet the needs of handicapped learners in rural settings. As a result of these college-rural school partnerships, a curriculum infusion approach to preservice rural teacher preparation has been undertaken at CSR. This approach has combined and used rural resources to supplement existing special and regular education curricula. It has assisted faculty to enrich courses and programs so that graduating students will be better prepared to serve the handicapped in rural school districts. This approach and the various resources and strategies used in its development will be summarized.

A Curiculum Infusion Approach to

Preservice Rural Teacher Preparation: Strategies and Resources

The preservice program described in this paper is an outgrowth of U.S. Department of Education Grant #G008301642, "Collaboration of the College of Saint Rose and Chief School Officers to Improve Service to Handicapped Students." This grant is a three year project concerned with the education of handicapped students in rural schools and the preservice education of teachers preparing for rural service.

There are two major goals for the project. First, to assist Chief School Officers (CSOs) in fifteen rural school districts in upstate New York to addresss problems encountered by their district and building personel in meeting the educational needs of the handicapped students in their school districts. The second major goal of the grant is to assist The College of Saint Rose (CSR) Education Division faculty improve preservice programming and teacher training to better meet the needs of handicapped learners in rural settings. The progress made in implementing the first goal has been described elsewhere (Sarachan-Deily, Medved, Ognibene, Lyon, & Grippin, 1984a,b; Grippin, Sarachan-Deily, Medved, Lyon, & Ognibene, 1984; Medved, Lyon, Sarachan-Deily, Grippin, 1985; Grippin, Sarachan-Deily, Medved, & Lyon 1985a,b).

This paper describes the progress toward the second major goal, i.e., improving preservice rural teacher preparation. This goal is articulated in the grant as follows: "To establish a preservice teacher education program at the College of Saint Rose that produces graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will enable them to work successfully with mainstreamed learners in rural school districts."

We intend for this paper to be disseminated and utilized by college-rural school district partnerships or consortia in other locations. We feel that similar projects or model programs can be successful in other teacher training institutions.

Objectives

In order to modify the preservice teacher training programs at CSR so that graduates will have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work successfully with handicapped students in rural districts, the following three major grant objectives were implemented:

1. to utilize the expertise of rural CSOs and teams to improve the preservice curriculum, such that graduating teachers will have the skills to work more effectively with handicapped learners in rural school settings;

2. to provide practicum and student teaching settings in which the unique needs of handicapped students in rural school districts

are being addressed;

3. to provide a rural resource booklet for CSR Education Division faculty to assist their infusing rural information into education courses and curricula.

First, the expertise of rural administrative teams, consisting of CSOs, additional high-level rural administrators, and Committee on the Handicapped (COH) chairpersons was utilized to generate suggestions for improving the preservice curriculum. Secondly, student teaching practica were offered in participating rural districts to give students "hands on" experience with rural students. Thirdly, a Rural Education Curriculum Resource Booklet was developed to assist the Education Division faculty identify and utilize available information on rural teaching in their courses.

Collaboration With CSOs

Information from the rural administrative teams was obtained through formal questionnaires, Regional Cooperative meetings, and individual meetings with CSOs in rural school districts. During Fall, 1983, questionnaires were sent to the 15 participating rural school districts, with instructions to the team members to complete and return the survey. Twenty-nine questionnaires were returned; this was a return rate of 39%. (Refer to Grippin, et.al., 1985a, b

for a response summary.) On these questionnaires, the rural administrative teams identified issues which impact on rural education in ways not found in urban/suburban settings. These issues included: classrooms containing students with a large variety of handicapping conditions and the resulting need for "specialists" to function as "generalists;" the need for specialists to travel to many schools; and insufficient numbers of trained specialists in rural school districts and their rapid turnover. They also identified successful rural teachers as needing good communication skills, an awareness of rural sociology, cross-categorical preparation, and the ability to work in and with the rural community. Ten percent of the rural administrators indicated they saw no differences between the characteristics of successful rural and urban/suburban teachers. Although useful information was obtained in this manner, there seemed to be a lack of awareness of some pertinent issues identified in the research literature (Grippin, et. al, 1985a, b).

During Spring, 1984, a Regional Cooperative Meeting was held at CSR. Participants included teams of CSOs, other rural administrators, and COH chairs from the five rural school districts in Region I (Columbia County, New York). These rural administrators and teachers have direct experience with the unique problems of educating handicapped students in rural areas. The

teams met with the Rural Education Grant Staff, Grant consultants, and the CSR Task Force (which consists of faculty volunteers from each of the Education programs at CSR).

To facilitate communication concerning the special nature of the problems faced by teachers in rural school districts, a portion of the agenda consisted of an activity where the rural teams and the CSR Task Force members met together to brainstorm preservice educational needs for students preparing for rural teaching. Specifically, their task was to list the critical skills that teachers in rural school districts need to be successful and to describe issues that special education teachers in rural school districts should be familiar with. The general feedback from this activity indicated that CSR Education programs need to address the preparation of preservice teachers working with students in rural settings. The rural teams recommended that curricular emphasis should be given to the nature of rural schools, the characteristics of rural communities, and the skills needed by rural teachers. They identified relevant skills and issues, including improving attitudes towards rural education, developing an understanding and sensitivity to rural communities, and obtaining knowledge of the sociological characteristics of rural areas and rural problems. They also recommended that teachers

preparing for service in rural areas should possess a repertoire of generalized skills in order to wear many "hats," and that they should be willing to work with lesser amounts of support and supervision during their first years. Thus, the rural teams provided input to the CSR Education faculty regarding the information, skills, and attitudes that preservice students need to have, to work effectively with handicapped students in mainstreamed settings in rural areas.

It was difficult to find common times for administrative teams from the rural districts to meet at CSR. As district administrators were often busy, and many of them wore more than one "hat" and could not leave their district for long periods of time, scheduling difficulties threatened the success of the Regional Meetings. As a consequence of the difficulties experienced in assembling rural teams and in finding common meeting times, it was decided that a change in strategy was needed in the other two Regions.

During Fall, 1984 and Spring, 1985, individual meetings were held with each of the participating Chief School Officers in Region II (Greene County, NY). The information received from the CSOs was consistent with that from the Regional Meeting. It was decided to continue with individual meetings with the five CSOs and rural teams in Region III (Rensselaer County, NY), rather than conducting

Regional Meetings to obtain this information. Although the opinions were generated from a single district at a time, rather than from a sharing of ideas and input among five districts in the Region, the individual meetings were successful vehicles for accomplishing the project's objectives.

The input provided from the CSOs and their rural administrative teams, along with conclusions drawn from a review of the literature on preservice preparation of rural educators, was used as the basis for curricular and program modifications at CSR.

Providing Practicum and Student Teaching Settings

The ongoing exchanges between CSR faculty and the CSOs involved in the program provided an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual benefit between CSR and LEAs. The staff development programs and technical assistance (Medved, Lyon, Sarachan-Deily & Grippin, 1985) helped to create environments where handicapped students were being well-served. All 15 participating rural school districts made commitments to serve as future cooperating sites for students from preservice education programs at CSR. Indeed, the school districts seemed delighted to serve as cooperating sites and the CSOs viewed student teacher placements as a benefit, rather than an obligation of grant participation. The resulting linkages with rural public school systems insured quality field placement

opportunities for CSR students and realistic experiences with handicapped students in rural districts.

Although approximately 120 education students are placed in practicum or student teaching experiences each semester, there was some initial reluctance on the part of the CSR Coordinator of Student Teaching and the CSR Education Division faculty to place students in rural school districts. This reluctance was based primarily on the remoteness of these districts and the difficulties with direct supervision, the financial and time constraints of college supervisors, the certification status of cooperating teachers, the isolation of students placed in rural districts and the difficulties in returning to campus for required seminars, and the resulting problems in maintaining the quality of the student teaching experience at CSR. Since CSR's current models of student teaching are validated and satisfactory, there was an unwillingness to implement new models of student teaching supervision to accommodate the unique needs of students in these more remote areas.

Interestingly enough, the level of cooperation among rural school districts was very high. The CSOs in Regions I and II stated that they each had teachers who commute from Albany, and the CSOs would be willing to arrange for student teachers to share rides with their commuting faculty. The CSOs also stated that

they could arrange for a student teacher to live with a local family for a semester to "gain a real understanding of life in rural America." Further, each CSO indicated that videotape equipment was available in their schools, and they could have a student teacher taped on a regular basis to provide additional feedback.

During Fall, 1985, we have student teachers placed in two of the participating rural school districts. These students will have the opportunity to work exclusively with rural students. Although this is a small n, it is a beginning, and it is anticipated that the numbers will increase in future semesters. Pre-placement survey data has been collected, and it is hoped that post-placement comparisons will be revealing.

Curriculum Infusion Strategies for Preservice Training

During the Summer and Fall, 1985, a curriculum infusion approach to preservice rural teacher preparation has begun at CSR. As a result of the college-rural school partnerships that were developed, we realized that our special and regular education curricula should include additional information on rural teaching. As a result of Task Force meetings with Education Division faculty, we realized that CSR faculty were willing to include rural information in their courses, but they did not have the necessary

information to modify their courses (or time to research the information). Finally, we realized the curricular and fiscal constraints at CSR and the impossibility of implementing a special curriculum or new program to train teachers for rural areas.

Based on feedback from CSOs, rural teams, the CSR Task Force, CSR Education Division faculty, and from a review of the literature, a Rural Education Curriculum Resource Booklet was prepared during the Summer, 1985. The information from these sources was translated into specific student competencies which could be met by course changes in the current teacher education training programs at CSR. In this way, the many constituencies involved provided the basis for including a rural component in the teacher preparation curriculum at CSR, with emphasis on the problem of educating handicapped students in regular classes in rural schools.

The purpose of the Rural Education Curriculum Resource Booklet is to supplement existing special and regular education curricula at CSR by assisting faculty in enriching their courses and programs, such that graduates will be better prepared to serve the handicapped students in rural settings. The Booklet provides CSR Education Division faculty with materials that can be adapted to the existing curricula. This "curriculum infusion approach" allows an instructor to select objectives, competencies, activities and/or

materials, both excerpted and non-excerpted, are available to faculty through the Grant Office. Finally, the Booklet contains a listing of the 19 National Rural Project Modules and a working bibliography of materials written on teaching handicapped and nonhandicapped students in rural areas.

During the Summer, 1985, letters were sent to CSR Education Faculty asking for volunteers to infuse rural information into at least one course during the Fall, 1985 semester. Interested faculty were asked to maintain a copy of the actual course materials on rural teaching, the test questions used with the rural unit, and summary statistics on student performance. In addition to providing the sample materials, the Grant will pay any faculty volunteer an "honorarium" of $50. During Fall, 1985, nine full-time faculty members will be infusing rural material into their courses.

Providing a Model Program

The rural teams provided the CSR faculty valuable input regarding information, skills, and attitudes that preservice students need to have to work effectively with handicapped students in mainstreamed settings in rural areas. The CSR Grant staff translated this information into specific student competencies to be met by course changes, and ultimately, curricular modification in the teacher education programs at CSR. In this way, the project

materials appropriate to a specific course or topic and to supplement and complement existing course materials. The Booklet serves as a guide to rural education resources available at CSR, including the 19 Rural Education Preservice Modules prepared and disseminated by the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project (NRP), Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington.

The Booklet contains an introduction and rationale for teacher preparation for rural service (information that could be used to introduce a unit). It gives five key competencies for teaching handicapped children in rural areas and it identifies several major objectives for teaching each competency. In addition, the Booklet contains suggested or sample content for teaching these objectives in college-level courses. The suggested content includes educational profiles, readings, activities, dilemmas, simulations, discussion questions, transparencies, resource lists, information on new technology, etc. Where possible, actual materials and activities were excerpted from conference papers, newsletters, workshops, NRP modules, and journal articles. When the relevant materials were too long to reproduce, the Booklet refers the faculty member to materials in the Rural Education Grant office, with titles, page numbers and suggested uses being given. All

has provided the basis for inclusion of a rural component in the teacher preparation curriculum at CSR, with emphasis on the problem of educating handicapped students in regular class in rural schools. The modifications implemented at CSR are within the scope of other teacher training institutions and will be disseminated locally and nationally.

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